

The Importance and Impact of Nurses Serving on Boards

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Regardless of education, background, or experience, there is a place on a board, commission, or appointment for every nurse. To advance its mission, the Nurses on Boards Coalition works with organizations to identify candidates who are a good fit with the desired skill sets, qualifications, and experience for board leadership.

The Nurses on Boards Coalition (NOBC) was launched in November 2014 with funding support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Center to Champion Nursing in America, as a direct response to the Institute of Medicine's 2011 landmark report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. The report called for nurses to play a more pivotal decision-making role on boards and commissions and to prepare/take action to lead change. It was believed that if the majority of the large national nursing and healthcare organizations would form a coalition to work collaboratively toward a single goal, the important aim of improving the health of communities nationwide could be achieved.

In 2017, NOBC evolved to become an independent, 501(c)(3) public charity, fulfilling the vision of the founders. Today, NOBC represents 29 national nursing organization members, 6 member affiliate organizations, 56 diverse strategic partners and sponsors, 50 state contacts and the District of Columbia, along with a host of volunteer supporters across the country, who are passionate about the NOBC mission; all working together to build healthier communities in America by increasing the presence of nurses on corporate, health-related, and other boards, appointments, panels, and commissions.

Importance of Nurses Serving on Boards

With dynamic changes occurring in health care, now is the time for the voice of nurse leaders to be heard. Through our own board roles and service over many years, we have experienced firsthand the importance of nurses serving in a wide range of governance roles.

Governance is an extension of leadership. As nurse leaders, it is both a privilege and a responsibility to serve on boards. Nurses have the responsibility to lead change to improve health for all in our country. Board service is a powerful way for nurses to leverage their knowledge, skills, and experience to shape strategies and policies to bring about much needed change in a way that serves patients, families, populations, and communities.

All boards can benefit from the nursing perspective. The nursing profession has evolved to include a diverse group of professionals dedicated to serving patients, families, and communities and is ideally suited to bring unique perspectives to the boardroom. Nurses possess a wide range of skills including strategic planning, critical thinking, communications, quality and process improvement, human resources, finance, and complex problem solving. Accustomed to working in teams, nurses fit naturally into the board environment. Always connected to the mission, they understand the challenges, opportunities, and implications of decisions on many levels.

Nurses historically are underrepresented on all types of boards. Without a nurse, boards miss the perspective of the most trusted profession, as ranked in the annual Gallup poll for the last 16 consecutive years (Brenan, 2018), as well as representation of the largest segment of the healthcare workforce.

The involvement of their nurse executives in high-profile community boards builds credibility and enhances the reputation for the organizations that employ them. Serving on community boards, nurses are extending the reach and reputation of the hospital beyond the clinical environment in helping shape policy and strategy decisions that impact these critical areas of patient care across the continuum of care. (Lawrence W. Vernaglia as cited in Benson & Harper, 2017, p. 14)

Serving on boards is also a way for nurses to grow professionally and personally and to give back. Many nurses report they feel they receive so much more than they give when serving on diverse boards, and it enables them to bring fresh perspectives and insights to their own workplace. It is often energizing, impactful, and inspiring!

Types of Boards on Which Nurses Serve

NOBC places a high value on all types of board service and encourages nurses to serve in a wide range of boards. For purposes of NOBC data collection, the operational definition of boards that qualify to “incorporate the unique expertise of nurses” are those that have strategic influence to improve the health of communities and the nation. They include any corporate, governmental, non-profit, advisory, or governance boards or appointments that have fiduciary and/or strategic responsibilities.

There are four primary types of boards including *advisory, non-profit, private, and public corporate*, as well as appointments, panels, and commissions. Start-up and early-stage companies led by entrepreneurs provide an example of emerging opportunities for

nurses to serve on boards and help bring new products, services, and solutions to the market in a variety of industries. It is our intention to be inclusive with regards to a wide range of boards; nurses serving on any of these types of boards count toward NOBC’s key strategy of 10,000 board seats held by nurses by 2020.

Opportunities for All Nurses to Serve

Nurses at all levels of experience are needed for board service. As the NOBC works with individual nurses in communities across the United States, it is imperative assistance is provided to ensure the right nurse ends up on the right board at the right time. From highly experienced nurse leaders serving on large hospital and health systems boards, on the boards of *Fortune 500* companies, or in national governmental appointments, to novice nurses serving on the boards of parent-teacher organizations of their local schools, youth sports leagues, neighborhood associations, and places of worship, there is a place for every nurse who has the desire to serve. Across America the NOBC and its partners have created educational sessions designed to assist nurses in locating the board that meets the interest and passion of each individual nurse. In addition to personal educational sessions, many valuable resources are available on the NOBC website.

Examples of How Serving Can Improve the Health of Communities and the Nation

Numerous partners and supporters of NOBC have shared their experiences with how the addition of nurses on their boards have contributed to improved outcomes. Examples follow.

The Nurses on Boards Coalition (NOBC) has been a powerful partnership for WEA Trust. When we became aware of this effort, we immediately saw the importance of having experienced nurse leaders on our board and how their backgrounds would complement our conviction to

Table 1.
Nurses on Boards Coalition Metrics

	6/1/2019	12/1/2018	12/1/2017
NOBC Key Metrics			
Nurses serving on all boards	5,034	4,499	3,111
Total boards registered	8,706	7,856	5,479
Board seats counting toward key strategy – 10,000 by 2020	6,140	5,483	3,763
Nurses who want to serve	9,343	8,091	4,385
Nurses currently serving on boards and interested in serving on another	2,984	2,627	1,796
Total database users	14,444	12,577	NA
Newsletter recipients	10,742	8,911	4,874
Nurse CV uploads	484	347	NA
Nurse stories submitted	97	84	56
Organizations Supporting the Mission of NOBC			
National member nursing associations	29	28	26
Member organization affiliates	6	5	3
Strategic partners/sponsors	56	53	30

keep health plan members safe. The selection process was seamless, beginning with NOBC truly understanding our goals and needs as a company and then vetting top candidates for our consideration. The matching and selection of candidates is a key function and asset of partnering with NOBC. As we think about the larger challenges of health care, we understand how valuable it is when you bring nurses and their extraordinary wealth of information to the conversation – impacting and creating critical healthcare change in the industry. Our partnership with NOBC has enhanced our board representation and, ultimately, the decisions we make as a company. – *Tim Bartholow, MD, Vice President & Chief Medical Officer, NeuGen Health*

Without exception, nursing representatives on the board have proved to be invaluable. They were not so much an advocate for nursing, but they advocated for the needs of patients. As the board focused on matters of care quality – the

voice of nursing was both critical and creditable.” – *John W. Bluford, III, Past Chair, American Hospital Association; President, Bluford Healthcare Leadership Institute; President Emeritus, Truman Medical Centers*

Impact of Nurses on Boards

When nurses serve on boards, they contribute to the collective impact of the board as a whole, so it is difficult to measure the specific impact of any one individual on the board dynamic. Nurses often contribute as change agents, leading change to bring about the best possible outcomes in support of the organization’s mission. Nurses are uniquely and ideally suited to impact board discussions and outcomes by exhibiting an exceptional ability in listening, calling upon their critical-thinking skills, utilizing evidence-based approaches, and by asking key questions that often result in new thinking, discussions, and outcomes.

One of the strategic imperatives of the Nurses on Boards Coalition is to measure the impact of nurses on boards. Nearly 100 nurse

stories are posted on the NOBC website with examples of why nurses serve on specific boards and the impact they are having (see Table 1). In 2019, the NOBC Impact of Nurses on Boards Work Group is conducting an initial qualitative research study to begin measuring the impact of nurses on boards. NOBC is committed to conducting additional research in the future to clearly demonstrate and articulate the value and impact of nurses serving on boards.

To advance its mission, NOBC works with organizations to identify candidates from over 14,000 nurses registered in its database who are a good fit with the desired skill sets, qualifications, and experience for board leadership. The opportunities are abundant for all nurses to raise their leadership voices in boardrooms in communities where they live and align their qualifications and passion with the board that is right for them.

Summary

Regardless of the level of education, background, or experience, there is a place on a board, commission, or appointment for *every* nurse. NOBC's work does not end until the right nurse is serving on the right board where it creates strategic value to do so. Each appointment brings America one step closer to our collective goal of healthier communities and nation. Where will you choose to serve?

As this is the first of a series of columns focused on nurses serving on boards, we would appreciate hearing what specific topics or areas of focus you would like to learn about in future columns. Please share your thoughts by contacting us at nobc@nursesonboardscoalition.org. We sincerely welcome your suggestions, comments, and feedback!

Also, we urge each of you to please register in the NOBC database located on the NOBC website (www.nursesonboardscoalition.org) to report your board service and/or indicate your interest in serving on your first board or an additional board. NOBC is here to help you along your journey in board service.

Together, across America, nurses are leading change and making a difference by serving on all types of boards, commissions, panels, and appointments as we collectively improve the quality of life and health for all. Please join this important work! \$

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Editor's Note: To highlight the importance and benefits of nurses on boards, *Nursing Economic\$* is proud to partner with the Nurses on Boards Coalition in publishing the Nurses on Boards column. Also, listen to the *Nursing Economic\$* Podcast with Coalition leaders at www.nursingeconomic.net

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